

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 06548 384 2

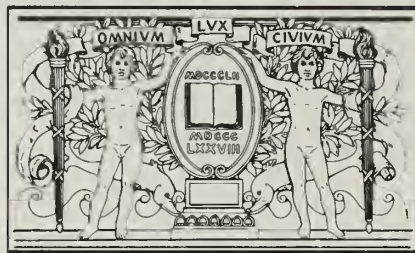
GOV DOC

F74

.J3J35x

c.3





BOSTON
PUBLIC
LIBRARY



gov. 91-1008



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

http://archive.org/details/jamaicaplain00bost_0





Feeding the Swans at Jamaica Pond,
Jamaica Plain, Mass.

Jamaica Plain

BOSTON 200 NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY SERIES

F74
.J3J35x
Copy 3



HENRY ADAMS, the nineteenth century philosopher, said that the history of America is not the history of the few, but the history of the many. The people of Boston's neighborhoods accepted the challenge of Adam's statement to produce "people's histories" of their own communities. Hundreds of Bostonians formed committees in each of fifteen neighborhoods of the city, volunteering their time the past year and a half to research in libraries, search for photographs, produce questionnaires, transcribe tapes, assist in writing and editing; most important, act as interviewers and subjects of "oral history" research. These booklets are not traditional textbook histories, and we have not attempted to cull a statistical sample. We have simply talked with our neighbors, people who remember sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, but always with wisdom. For each of us has his or her own story to tell, and these stories are vital to the development of our neighborhoods and our city.

© 1976, The BOSTON 200 Corporation
Boston 200 is the city's official program to observe the Bicentennial of the American Revolution from April 1975 through December 1976.

KEVIN H. WHITE, Mayor
KATHARINE D. KANE,
President, The Boston 200 Corporation
1 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108
617-338-1775

JAMAICA PLAIN

JAMAICA PLAIN was an early settlement in the Commonwealth, and though never chartered as a plantation or a town, it has thrived as a community for some three hundred years. The records of the 1670s and the 1680s already mention it as if everyone in the town of Roxbury knew its location. All you had to do, according to one entry in the *Roxbury Town Records* of 1683, was to follow the “way that leades from the corner of Calobs orchard towards Jamaica Plain . . .” and it was worthwhile taking that way, too, for it soon uncovered a fertile land bordered on one side by fresh, long-running Stony Brook, and on the other by the blue kettle of Jamaica Pond. The view made people think of paradise, and they sometimes called Jamaica Plain the Eden of America.

How Jamaica Plain got its name, no one has been able to say for sure. One resident, Jonathan Frank, who directs the Rent-A-Kid Program on Green Street, says that he has “heard a good explanation for Jamaica Plain. The reason that it was called ‘plain’ is not because the area was a plain in the beginning. It’s just that it had no trees on it—it was a bare area. And it was called ‘plain’ because everything else was forest,

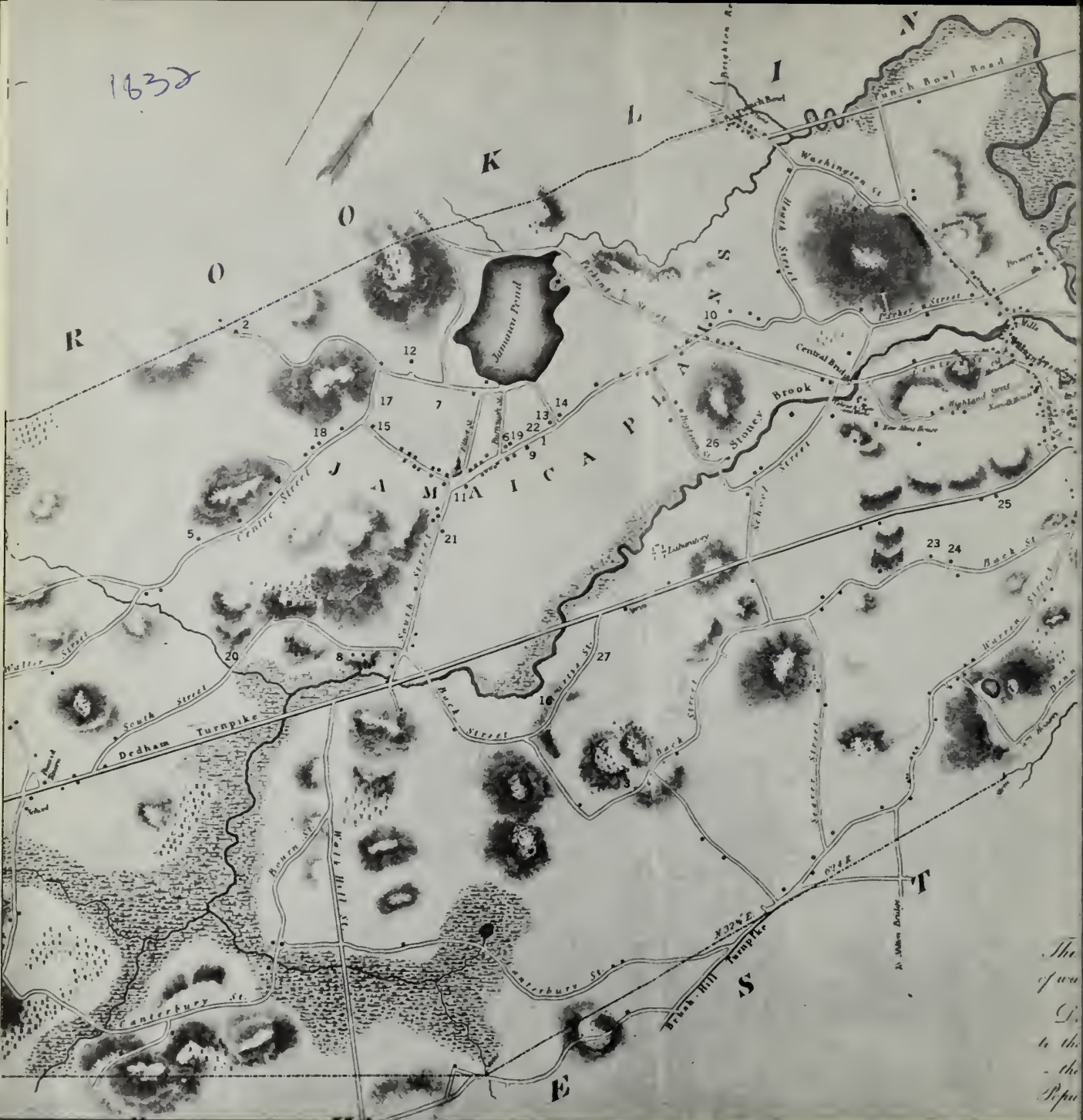
while it was all wild grass. That’s where the ‘plain’ came from. The ‘Jamaica’ part of the name comes from the fact that the old families made their money in Jamaica Rum.” From high up on Parker Hill or Moss Hill, where the land was still mostly forest and wild grass, Jamaica Pond probably seemed to sit in the middle of a small plain, and sometimes it was called Pond Plain.

But the name ‘Jamaica’ has inspired several stories to explain it. In 1847, Charles Willis included three different explanations in his book *The History of Roxbury Town*. In one account, the name ‘Jamaica’ stems from an attempt by a London man to escape from his gossip wife. He had business in Jamaica, in the West Indies, he told her, and booked passage on a ship and never came back. After months of waiting, she set sail for Jamaica too, but failed to find him, though she asked everywhere. On her way back to England, she told her troubles to the other passengers and to people in the streets of Boston, where her ship docked for a few days. By chance, a Bostonian recognized her husband from her description as a man living at Pond Plain, and took her to him. The reunion was not a happy

FRONT COVER: *Children feeding the swans at Jamaica Pond*

INSIDE COVER: *The Children’s Museum, ca. 1920*

1632



The
of
to
the
Popu

*The Curtis Home,
built 1639*



ne, but ever since the name “Jamaica Plain” has reminded New Englanders of husbands who go off to far places on business.

Once the English under Oliver Cromwell had taken the island of Jamaica from Spain in 1655, there grew up a brisk trade of New England fur and lumber for such tropical products as rum and sugar. With trade came travel, and some people believed that wealthy owners of sugar plantations built themselves summer houses near the pond and named the area Jamaica Plain after their homes in the Caribbean. But as Ellis shows, the only sugar planter to come from the Caribbean to Jamaica Plain was Timothy Penny, who built his house near the pond no earlier than 1767, far too late to account for the name “Jamaica.”

A good drink of Jamaican rum has also warmed the imagination of story tellers to explain the name of Jamaica Plain. Drake complains in his 1878 history

The Town of Roxbury of the story that traces the name “Jamaica Plain” to the residents, who drank Jamaican rum often and preferred it plain. The *Jamaica Plain News* in 1908 told of a minister in Grand Central Station who couldn’t remember the name of the Boston suburb where he was expected. “Whiskey Straight,” he told the ticket agent. “No such place near Boston,” the agent said. “Maybe near Cheyenne or Tombstone, or Medicine Hat, but not Boston.” Then after a minute the agent said again, “Oh, you want Jamaica Plain.” And sure enough, the minister did. The oldest story, though, is told by Charles Ellis, who was not above believing that Indians living near the pond would go into the town street in the early days looking for rum and saying, “Indian love Jamaica.” Gradually, their area of Roxbury came to be called Jamaica Plain.

The probable truth is that the name “Jamaica” comes from the Algonquian language, as Arthur W.

Austin first suggested as far back as 1868. In 1909, Charles W. Greene wrote in the *Jamaica Plain News* that at the end of what is now Pond Street, there once lived a "widow of the Indian Chief, who bore the historic and beautiful appellation of 'Jamaica.'" She supported her children by fishing and making baskets for the young couples who enjoyed rides in the country, "out on the Plains to Jamaica's."

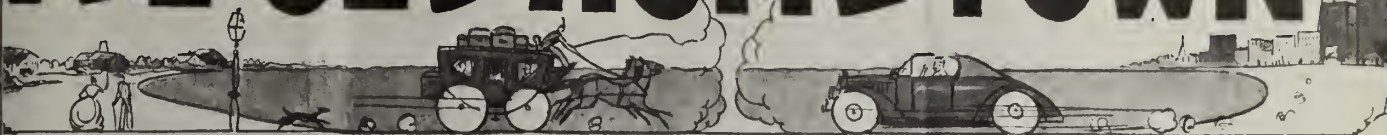
"Jamaica" *does* come from the name of an Indian, but not from a squaw. Instead it is an abbreviation of the name of the Indian sachem, Kutchemakin, who ruled the territory between what is now Dorchester, Milton and Sudbury in the early 17th century. John Eliot, the Apostle to the Indians, knew him and tried unsuccessfully to convert him to Christianity. Kutchemakin pledged allegiance to King James, but refused conversion on the grounds that if he and his people became Christians they would no longer pay him tribute. Kutchemakin translated means "big feather," and obviously has nothing to do with the features of Jamaica Pond or its surroundings. Early spellings were Jamaco, Jemaco, and Jameco, and it may be that the current form "Jamaica" stems from a fanciful association with the British island in the Caribbean. It is also possible that Indians did live by the pond and that their chief's name was indeed used to identify the area.

The exact boundaries of Jamaica Plain seem as mysterious as its name. Richard Soderberg, the youth director of the Jamaica Plain Area Planning Action Council, recalls that he used to think of Franklin Park as a part of his neighborhood when he was growing up on Montebello Road. But now he isn't sure. And Cynthia Zaitzevsky notes in her *Jamaica Plain Survey* that "Jamaica Plain has never been a clearly defined area." During its history, Jamaica Plain has at various times been a part of Roxbury, then of West Roxbury until it finally became a part of Boston in 1874. In West Roxbury's short life as a separate town, the residents considered Eliot Square in Jamaica Plain "the social

and political center of the community." They built their town hall in 1868 in Eliot Square where the Civil War monument stands, next to the Loring-Greenough house, and opposite the Unitarian Church. Despite shifting boundaries and annexations, despite its changing fortunes as a political center, Jamaica Plain has remained intact, a community with a character of its own.

Part of Jamaica Plain's present character has to do with its mixtures of neighborhoods and people. According to John Spears, until recently the manager of the Jamaica Plain Little City Hall in Curtis Hall, the area "is composed of several different neighborhoods—the White City area, Moss Hill, Jamaica Pond, Central Jamaica Plain, Bromley-Heath, the Model Cities area, Hyde Square—all these are really separate. The challenge is to get them all together, because they all do relate, and they all make Jamaica Plain what it is, a vibrant group of different communities. The problem is that they do not talk. Someone from Moss Hill would almost never be walking in Egleston Square; but also someone from Egleston Square would almost never be walking in Moss Hill. There's a big gap there. What brings these several groups together? Several things. Little City Hall does help, because we do service everybody, and there's a planning program we're trying to develop which will involve everybody. There's the Jamaica Plain Community Council which is trying to pull people together. The Agassiz Community School is Jamaica Plain-wide in scope; they had new elections and they've opened up to people in several different areas." The theme that John Spears emphasizes is the variety of people and places in Jamaica Plain: the wealthy and the poor, the ring of ethnic groups, all split apart by their own interests, all bound together by some common needs. Jamaica Plain includes hills and waterways, farmland and the Arboretum, elegant homes and rowhouses, industries and medical centers, parks and graveyards. In all, Jamaica Plain is a variegated

THE OLD HOME TOWN



Jamaica Plain



*The old
Eliot School, ca. 1895*



world—attached to Boston, but within itself a place to raise children, to send them to school, to work, just as it has been throughout its history.

Very soon after the Puritan settlers arrived in Roxbury in 1630, they began to transform the Jamaica end of the town into a community of their own. They laid out Quincticut Lane (now Perkins Street), constructed a toll road from Roxbury to Dedham (called Centre Street since 1835), and a highway (now Amory Street) from Isaac Heath's pasture lot by Stony River to Gamblin's End, the name of a sudden slope of land near School Street. Near these roads, they built their houses and mills, worked their farms and gave names to the land. At the northeast corner of Jamaica Pond, the settlers built a mill to grind meal, and nearby there

probably was a beautiful stand of trees that they called "Squirrels' Delight."

The early records of Jamaica Plain suggest that almost from the outset the community had growing pains. In 1675, a year after King Philip and his Indian people began their war against English settlers and settlements as close as Marlborough ablaze, the danger of a sudden attack prompted Hugh Thomas and his wife Clement and John Ruggles to donate land for the building of an elementary school within Jamaica Plain later named the Eliot School. (The school was built where the Monument is now.) They preferred to have the children close at hand rather than to have them go into town to the Roxbury Free School. But even when war no longer threatened, the school in Jamaica Plain

W. Dobbin's sketch of
the Loring-Greenough House and
First Congregational Church, 1815



continued to thrive. This bequest stipulated that the school open its doors to all children, white, black, and Indian.

The founding of Eliot School helped to protect and to educate the children of Jamaica Plain; it also encouraged a sense of community identity. In 1760, the residents organized their own church precinct, the Third Parish, built a church directly opposite the school in 1769, and separated themselves four years later, with some opposition, from the First Parish in Roxbury. So by the end of the eighteenth century Jamaica Plain already had a center for church and school, not far from the pond, and directly in front of the elegant Loring-Greenough House, built in 1760.

With the coming of the American Revolution, political differences in the community became so bitter that Joshua Loring had to flee his neighborhood for good. The argument centered in 1774 over selection of

members for the Governor's Council, whether to elect them as had long been the custom, or to appoint them as the King's men wanted. Loring was one of the King's men, and after he accepted an appointment to the council, his neighbors would not tolerate his views, nor would they leave him in peace. As *The History of the Loring-Greenough House* says, "There is a tradition that Loring spent all of the night before his flight arguing with his neighbor Joseph Brewer which cause to stand by; that the next morning, pistol in hand, he mounted his horse and left at full speed, stopping only to say to an old friend who asked, 'Are you going, Commodore?' 'Yes, I have always eaten the King's bread and always mean to.'" Soon after, Commodore Loring's family followed him.

As the American Revolution came to Jamaica Plain, the abandoned Loring House became a hospital for General Washington's troops. Across the road from

the hospital in the parsonage, Reverend William Gordon, the first minister of the Third Parish Church, took up the cause of the Revolution and became a chaplain to the Provincial Congress in 1775. Gordon especially championed freedom for all men and denounced slavery.

By the mid-eighteenth century Jamaica Plain was establishing a tradition of producing energetic and strong-minded men and women who would contribute much to the history of their community. The example of Loring, who fought in the British Navy and left behind him a mansion in Jamaica Plain that is now a national monument, was to be followed in the nineteenth century by Civil War officers who settled in what is now known as the Sumner Hill section of Jamaica Plain. As Mrs. Elizabeth Amberman, who lives in a house on Sumner Hill, recalls, "The officers came home from the war and built the houses in this area—all the colonels. There was Colonel Beaumont, Colonel Hyder and Colonel Livermore, who built this house. And Colonel Beaumont had built those brick houses on Greenough Avenue. The houses they built all had mansard roofs with beautiful copper flashings on them, except this house which Colonel Livermore built later, maybe in 1885."

Mrs. Amberman reinforces the point that throughout its history, people in Jamaica Plain have shown a deep concern for others. She remembers vividly Monsignor William J. Casey of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, who gave fully of himself to the people of Jamaica Plain during the Great Depression. The American Revolution found in Reverend Gordon a defender of freedom for all; the Depression showed in Monsignor Casey a spirit and charity unstinting in support of the needy. Mrs. Amberman says of him, "He believed in people. He didn't believe in fixing up the church property, when there were so many people out of work, so many people that had families with poor children that were going to make their first Holy Communion with no clothes. And he would say,



Monsignor Casey

'We've got to do something about that; we can't have that.' And he'd buy them white dresses and white shoes.

"Well, he cared that the church was neglected, but he thought people were more important than things and I think he was a real, priestly man. Everybody knew him or he knew everybody. He'd come along and even if he didn't know you, he'd start talking to you, asking how everything was and whether you were getting along all right. He wanted to be very much part of the community.

"After he was put in charge of St. Thomas's, he used to go around with his little black bag filled with gloves and socks and scarves. He would give them to people. Half the time he'd come back without any gloves on himself.

"And he was a very broadminded man. There was a little store, a newspaper and magazine and lending library store. Well, this lady owned the lending library and Monsignor Casey used to go in there and buy magazines. But some she had were a little risqué in those days, and she'd try to hide them. And he'd say, 'Now, I want to see everything, I want to see everything you've got under that counter.' He said he wanted to know what his parishioners were reading. He would buy magazines, and sometimes he would bring them back and say, 'Well, this one, I don't think you should have this one. I don't think my parishioners should read this.' But she loved him and lots of times he gave him magazines. He was really a wonderful, wonderful person."

Monsignor Casey's generosity continues an old tradition in Jamaica Plain of concern for all those in need. Today the same spirit of generosity remains strong in the work of Mike Kalajian, the proprietor of the Green Elm, a store at the corner of Green and Elm streets. It is a spirit that took hold of Mike in childhood, that came with him from Armenia to the United States, and that has joined itself, maybe without his knowledge, to the essential life of Jamaica Plain. As Mike says, "I came the hard way. I was an orphan. In World War I, a million and a half Armenians were massacred by the Turks. They all died in the Arabian desert. I was 13, in the desert for five years, and everybody was dead. I was adopted by a Moslem sheik, a good man. My brother and I were alone, year after year, with nobody we knew in the desert.

"And I was spared by God's prayer, out of the clear sky, when a holy man gave me his blessing. And I came to this country with a kind of freedom, after a million and a half died."

But Mike Kalajian didn't originally come to Jamaica Plain with the idea he must help others. Like many other immigrants, he worked hard, first as a manager for Liggett's drug stores and then in his own business, in the grocery retail trade and in real estate. His plans in Jamaica Plain were to "make a super-market, even in the days before there were any." The bank turned him down as a "bad risk." As a result, Mike says, "I got tied up there in the Green Elm. The next thing I know, one kid got into trouble. Another one got into trouble. They called me up, 'Mike, my father hasn't got no money, my mother hasn't got no money.' And I was not a rich man then. But I used to go and help them out, 50 dollars bail, 100 dollars bail. Thanks to Station 13, the juvenile officers over there, I used to call them: 'Please help this boy for me.' 'Okay, Mike.' And believe me, some of the finest juvenile officers in the United States come out of Station 13. This is humanity; I don't give up. And for each child you save, you make America that much stronger."

The people he serves across his counter in the Green Elm are generally working-class people, not, as he says, "the blue-blooded Yankees of years ago or high-class people now."

The distance from Mike Kalajian's store, from the tables where boys in trouble sit, to a Greek revival home off Eliot Street or an estate off Centre Street and Allandale Road where Marguerite Souther lived, seems very far, and yet the spirit of generosity has made the journey in Jamaica Plain. While the wealthy and fortunate in Jamaica Plain have found the amenities and values of their lives threatened, they have not stinted in generosity either.

In recent times Marguerite Souther is remembered for her dancing classes on Eliot Street that prepared young ladies for their coming out, but she also won the gratitude of Jamaica Plain for saving the Loring-Greenough House. As a teacher of young ladies and gentlemen, Miss Souther upheld an ideal of proper behavior and appearance. Miss Souther put a polish

A Day at the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood House

276 AMORY STREET

From 9.00 to 12.00. **Kindergarten.** About 40 children from 3 to 4 years old, under the direction of two graduate kindergartners assisted by student teachers, all volunteers. More children would come if there were more room. They look forward to it as soon as they begin to talk.

From 3.45 to 5.30. **Cooking.** Daily Class. More apply than can be accomodated.
Carpentry. Every boy of a certain age is asking for it.
Gymnasium. } for girls.
Games. }
Folk-Dancing. }
Games for boys.
Story Hour for younger children.

At 7.00 o'clock. **A Club for Girls,**

At 8.00 o'clock. **A Dancing Club** of 60 members.
The Mothers' Club.

Average total daily attendance of about 200.

Each day is different but every room is full. 150 boys are playing squash ball and basket ball. As many more come to watch the games. There are sewing, dressmaking and embroidery classes for the girls. At the "Fashion Show" in May they exhibit some very creditable dresses. The Mothers' Club also is taking a course in dressmaking.

Last summer the Mothers' Club contributed the proceeds of their year's social gatherings towards the rent of a cottage at Hough's Neck, where 21 families and their 92 children spent one or two weeks with the assistant headworker. For many it was the first vacation in years. Excepting part of the rent, the families paid their own expenses. Next summer the Club hopes to have two cottages.

Our success is due to the excellence of our workers, the friendliness of our neighbors, the devotion of the children and young people and the loyal support of their mothers.

Our limitations are due chiefly to the fact that we have not enough room or enough contributors. Every dollar given to the Neighborhood House is a good investment. It produces at least two dollars' worth of good citizenship.

Will You Invest?



The Neighborhood House's summer camp, 1940's

on her girls, and in making them shine, she used a kind of energy that sometimes produced sparks of laughter and sometimes unexpected shocks. Alice Woodall, Secretary of the Footlight Club, recalls, "She had a tremendous fund of energy—she would have just blown through the top of her head if she hadn't had an occupation. If it hadn't been dancing class, it would have been something else."

Girls would start at Miss Souther's classes in the primary grades. Every year they would return to her school on Eliot Street in the building owned by the Footlight Club to take part in afternoon parties, to learn social graces, and finally, to attend dancing classes, the Junior Eliots and the Senior Eliots. Mrs. Woodall recalls part of a dancing class: "When you got to be in the Junior Eliots, that was prep school boys you danced with. Then when you got to be in Senior Eliot, you might only be a junior or senior in high school, but you had Harvard freshman to dance with, and my, didn't you think you were grown-up. You really did; it was a more innocent age, I guess."

Some of the laughter in Miss Souther's classes came from her desire to have all her pupils "measure up." Mrs. Woodall says that "girls were scared to death of her, and if you had your dress cut a little bit low, you were told to go home and have your mother fill it with tulle." The boys, too, had their hands full. Some of them would carry a flask and some, as Mrs. Woodall says, "would hole up in the men's room. But that didn't phase Rita one little bit. She'd go right in there and drag them out. You had to have a healthy fear of what she might do. She was absolutely intrepid. A raging lion wouldn't have got anywhere at all."

Yet Marguerite Souther's devotion to an eccentric ideal had its generous side. She made hardly any profit from her dancing classes, and even risked her wealth to support the way of life she admired. In 1924, as Mrs. Woodall says, "The Greenoughs were going to sell the Loring-Greenough House to a business combine that was going to tear it down and raise a block of stores.

The Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club wanted to buy it but they had to get a loan. And Miss Souther put up \$16,000 of her own money to insure that loan. Well the women in the club worked like beavers, and they paid off the mortgage in three years. But Miss Souther guaranteed the loan, and that's a side of Rita that many people don't know about. She worked intrepidly for the Loring-Greenough House and for the Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club."

Miss Souther's desire to save the Loring-Greenough House as a landmark is just one of many local efforts to preserve the land of Jamaica Plain from careless urban planning. Throughout the history of Jamaica Plain most of its residents have tried with less success than they would like to retain its natural features, to keep it as a neighborhood. One part of the land in Jamaica Plain that has retained and improved its natural features is the Arnold Arboretum. The land for the Arboretum, according to its director, Professor Richard Howard, was left by Benjamin Bussey "to a family that did not farm it. Instead, they allowed one part of the Bussey Farm to be used as an agricultural institute the first college of agriculture in the United States, and subsequently, the area remaining was set aside for the Arboretum. The first director, Charles Sprague Sargent, had this problem of taking this old, worn-out farm-land and creating an arboretum. While Sargent surveyed the land and was making a list of the native trees and shrubs and deciding which to keep, he became acquainted with Frederick Law Olmsted, who had been hired by the City of Boston to develop a park system. Together, they made the Arboretum a major link in the emerald necklace, the park land that ran from the Common to the Garden and the Fenway to Franklin Park. They laid out the grounds together despite a conflict. When Sargent wanted to put the plants that were related to one another close together and Olmsted wanted something spectacular and attractive. A compromise was reached by putting the lilacs along the road, for example, instead of just off it

Ward's Pond



corner with all the other members of the olive family.

"One criticism of the Arboretum nowadays is that we are without green in the winter time, for the simple reason that all of our cone bearing plants—the gymnosperms—are located in one place. So we've tried to interplant at various areas to break up the monotony of a deciduous forest, to keep it attractive. There are two aspects to our work: one is that for many people this is a park; the second is that the Arboretum is a scientific institution. So our goal is to have attractive plants accessible to the public and maybe to isolate those of primarily scientific value because they are so precious."

The Arboretum celebrated its centennial in 1972, and despite financial difficulties, and a need for moral and physical support, the hope is that its 265 acres of trees and shrubs will continue to flourish. Soon, too, Jamaica Plain will celebrate the centennial of Frederick Law Olmsted's ideas for making its natural lands and waterways into magnificent parks. Olmsted

thought of Jamaica Pond and Franklin Park as two extraordinary jewels in the emerald necklace that he wanted to design for Boston and its neighborhoods. His purpose was, as the General Plan for Franklin Park states, "to provide opportunity for a form of recreation to be obtained only through the influence of pleasing natural scenery upon the sensibilities of those quietly contemplating it." He also wanted to keep much of Franklin Park wooded, "and adapted to the use of picnic and basket parties, especially small family parties. Various conveniences for these are to be prepared. Tennis courts, croquet grounds, archery ranges, and small lawns for little children's festivities, are provided for in near connection with the various picnic grounds." Near Jamaica Pond Olmsted saw possibilities for making the natural land pleasing to the residents of Jamaica Plain and other neighborhoods. Below Huntington Avenue, he saw a large cat-tail swamp that he helped to redesign as Leverett Pond. The route between Leverett Pond and Jamaica Pond, as Olmsted's



*A skating race
on Jamaica Pond, 1923*

biographer Norman T. Newton says in *Design on the Land*, “would lie in a belt of woods filling the valley around two small pools, Willow Pond and Ward’s Pond.” Olmsted’s plans for Jamaica Plain promised a border of nature on nearly all its sides. He never lived in the neighborhood, but even so, his genius as a landscape architect generously aimed to make Jamaica Plain a delightful area of Boston.

Many people in Jamaica Plain share Olmsted’s vision for Franklin Park and the Jamaica Pond area, but they have not been able to do all they want to make it an everyday part of their lives. Edwina Cloher-

ty, her friends and her children use Franklin Park just as Olmsted had hoped. From her home near the park she and “a bunch of neighbors and kids hiked up through the woods, called the ‘Wilderness,’ over the hills and found the blueberries in June. They weren’t ripe, but you could see the blueberry bushes down low. And the kids know that this is Roxbury pudding stone all around here and that the glacier left it all. It was like cowboys and Indians going through the woods and we ended up at Shattuck Field and cooked out there with the whole group.”

On other days, Mrs. Cloherty says, “The ladies in



*Washington Street
below the Orange Line*

the neighborhood get bikes for the kids and have a route all mapped out to Scarboro Pond. Down Forest Hills Street, into Williams, under the tunnel, around by Scarboro Pond and along the back road to the golf course and up and around."

But going to Franklin Park is not an everyday pleasure. For Mrs. Cloherty, her friends, and the children "it has to be a concentrated effort because of the condition that the park has been in. The neighborhood wants to have it restored. We think it is a great asset, but the park department certainly doesn't view it as anything that it ought to take great care of. We told the city close the park to traffic, and it worked for the first two years. When the barriers were first put up, it was cut and clear for the police to do their patrolling. Since then, a lot of barriers were destroyed, the police at the park were understaffed, and the young kids with their cars are beginning to have their drag races again. It's frustrating, but now we have new police and park commissioners, and we plan to give them copies of

what was spelled out about the care and policing of the park. So we'll be starting from point A together. The City has to change its attitude."

Long before the deterioration of Franklin Park, the Boston Elevated train had begun to destroy parts of modern Jamaica Plain. In the early 1900s, the mayor of Boston and the Board of Aldermen granted the right to the Boston Elevated Railway Company to put up the Orange Line along Washington Street from Dudley Street to Forest Hills. Hardly anyone who lived in Jamaica Plain wanted an overhead train, and some residents, led by Joseph J. Leonard of the Jamaica Plain Citizens Association, proposed to put it underground, like Stony Brook. In 1903 Leonard said, "For the people along Washington Street to advocate an elevated would be suicidal to their own welfare. It is true, some may say, that ample compensation will be made in money damages, but money damages cannot remedy the wound inflicted on an entire community. You may insert the knife and apply a little anesthetic

in the way of money damages but the wound remains.”

Since 1968, Lamartine and Call streets have also fallen victim to plans made outside Jamaica Plain, this time for a highway called the Southwest Corridor or I-95. The attack on Jamaica Plain by the highway planners, who had houses taken to build part of the interstate road of I-95 through Jamaica Plain, showed the same disregard for the neighborhood that the builders of the Washington Street elevated had in 1903. In the spring of 1970, author Al Lupo decided to write about the second attack on Jamaica Plain. He went to Lamartine Street, where houses in the path of I-95 had come down or had been abandoned and sketched in his book *Rites of Way* the plowed up remains of a working-class district. He stood in front of Number 260 Lamartine Street, “a yellow house with brown trim and a neat garden.” He talked with the owners, “an elderly couple, their home not needed for the highway.” They told him that they had “seen and heard the bulldozers and the earth movers rip up their neighbors’ homes and leave a flat dirt wasteland all the way to Number 226. They had watched the machines at work and had seen vandals rip the plumbing and pipes and all the other vital organs out of the abandoned houses, and finally, they had smelled the stench of arson and had heard the almost nightly wail and clanging of fire engines.”

The trains that ran for a century through Jamaica Plain made their last stop at Boylston Station in 1940, and as Otto Buchwald says, “with the advent of the automobile, and everybody buying a car, and not needing the trains and the stops here, the wives went shopping in the supermarkets.” Later, the automobile brought traffic jams to Jamaica Plain and blight to the Lamartine and Call street neighborhood, along the route of the proposed Southwest Corridor.

The decay in Jamaica Plain—the neglect of Franklin Park, the pollution of Stony Brook, the presence of an ugly overhead train on Washington Street and the wasteland surrounding the proposed super highway



The Southwest Corridor

cannot be prevented simply through the efforts of energetic people in the community, people like Edwin Cloherly today or Joseph J. Leonard in the past. Experience shows, as Al Lupo says, “that a community group, even an alliance of community groups, is often doomed to failure without some outside help at least at some stages of its life.” In the fight against the Washington Street elevated there was no outside help, and

Jamaica Plain saw the monstrous girders and tracks go p one of its most important streets.

But in the fight against I-95, Jamaica Plain did ave the help of experts. One of them, a young lawyer amed John Lynch, had been born and raised in the istrict. John Lynch didn't have to go far to find out bout I-95. As he told Al Lupo, "I had grown up by ne railroad tracks, and I remembered my friends' nothers saying they wouldn't fix up their houses be- ause the highway was coming. That was ten or twelve ears ago, and the highway still wasn't there, so I ough I'd find out where it was." John Lynch stayed n Jamaica Plain, working with the Jamaica Plain xpressway Committee on technical aspects, going to ne Department of Public Works, studying their plans. The result of his efforts and the efforts of many others a Jamaica Plain and in surrounding neighborhoods as the declaration of a moratorium in order to find ut what the people affected by the highway plans anted. Today the people of Jamaica Plain are work- ng with Anthony Pangaro, coordinator of the South- rest Corridor Project, to draw up proposals that they an live with. But the stopping of I-95 also brought ew problems. The people who live near Lamartine d Call streets look out on empty land stripped of ouses—a "dust bowl" some call it—and are not sure hat would be best to build on it. Parks? A new high hool? New housing? Like pioneers they are faced ith a land wiped clean and asked to redo it for them- elves and for generations to come. What they want ost to do is to stop the blight and to restore their eighborhood.

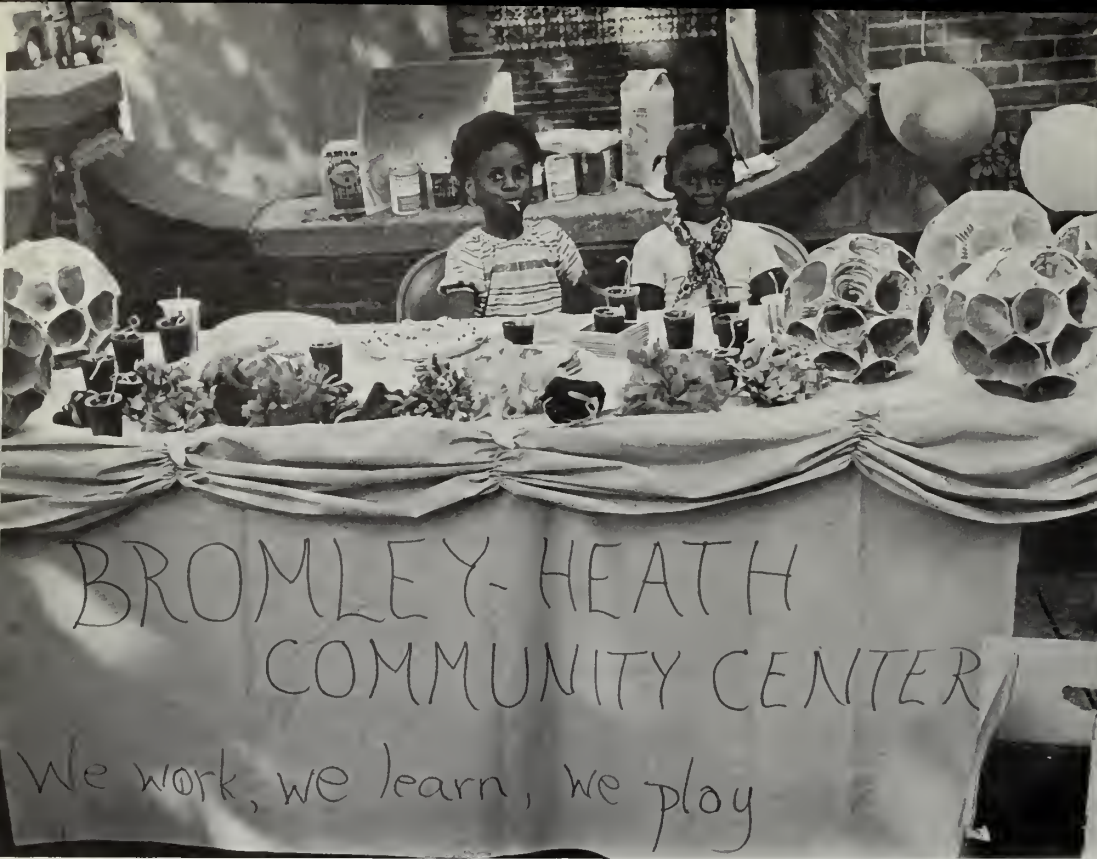
In other parts of Jamaica Plain, too, in Jamaica ills and in the "vertical city" of Bromley-Heath, esidents find themselves remaking their land. The mmunity that makes up the Bromley-Heath housing roject once was bleak. According to Lucille Maxwell, e dispatch controller for the Bromley-Heath Security atrol, "It wasn't easy living in a place where you ere afraid to stick your nose out the door or walk

down the street. The neighborhood was a jungle with everyone too scared to do anything about it. Daylight housebreaks and ladies getting purses stolen—that was normal." But a sick community is not normal, and the residents of Bromley-Heath decided to rid themselves of the disease. "About 1968 or 1969," Mrs. Maxwell says, "we started a volunteer patrol with eight men, and they were very committed and they worked out well. Then about two years ago with the Safe Streets Program, they thought it was a good idea to get a paid staff, and now we have twenty men on the patrol and we have a night shift.

"The patrol are almost like policemen. Like if people are fighting, we try to talk to the people and we try to break it up, and if that doesn't work, they radio me, and I call the police. We do everything. Like we assist people: we have first aid. Like last week there was a lady, thought she had epileptic seizures, and our operations manager—he's a first aid instructor—so he had to go over and administer first aid to the lady, plus we called the project police. They work hand in hand with us in case of sickness or if they have to transport someone to the hospital. So we help people in any way, form or shape."

But the great work of people at Bromley-Heath is, according to Anna Cole, the head of the Tenant Management Council, "to really bring the place up. There is tenant involvement, with tenants running the place. We have a Board of Directors made up of Bromley-Heath tenants. Like I live here, the manager lives here, and so we all have a vested interest here. There is a care and concern for people. It has put on a new face for tenants. You're not stereotyping them. We are all lumped together. If the heat goes off in the boiler room, I am also cold. It's not that I can beg off until five o'clock and then shoot off into another part of the city.

"The majority of the employees are tenants. They're gainfully employed and are able to get off welfare and provide for families. And we're nondiscriminatory. We have two female employees, and we have a broad



*Bromley Heath
Community Center*

nature of all ethnic backgrounds. We do have white; we do have Spanish-speaking and black—and they're working. And three years ago we started beautifying the grounds. We started out with flowers. We bought rosebushes, and the tenants added on themselves. Some of the maintenance men started their own gardens, and they're going to have a contest at the end of the year, and the one with the best garden will have a week's vacation. This is the first year we have gone into vegetables."

Finally, Mrs. Cole says that Bromley-Heath "isn't any different here—you know needs are no different here than they would be in Newton or Wellesley, ex-

cept for the money problem. One thing people have common here is that they're poor." The work of the Security Patrol and the Tenant Management Council is to make Bromley-Heath into a city of its own that people can be proud of, where they want to stay. They are poor, they still have as much pride in the community as the members of the Jamaica Hills Association, who have banded together to keep their district attractive. The Tenant Management Council of Bromley-Heath has worked as a team for five years. They have gotten money from HUD; they have used the funds to repair the buildings, to train people for different jobs, to develop a spirit of community.

*Bromley Park
and Parker Hill, ca. 1890*



In the same way, the Jamaica Hills Association made up of residents of the more affluent Moss Hill and Green Hill realizes that it must decide now how its community should develop in the future. Residents of Jamaica Hill value the houses in their neighborhood. They take pride in the Loring-Greenough House, Eliot Hall, taverns like the Peacock Tavern that once stood on Centre Street. Florence Soltys, a member of the association, lives close to one historic house that, she explains, "was used as a tavern when the road was still an old post road. And a young couple bought it, and they have two rooms very well restored right down to the old squared ceilings and walls. They had fireplaces rebuilt and all the chimneys, and they work." Further up Centre Street, along the Arborway, there was, as Mrs. Soltys says, "the old original May Farm. The house has had lots of additions to it, but the original was within that house." These houses are a reminder of an ideal life, of comfort, amenities, and neighborliness; an ideal that association members treasure and want to preserve.

The effort of the association is to control changes in their neighborhood, to restrict new construction, and to make it conform to the styles of already existing housing. Their hope is also to keep as much land as possible open. But such a goal is not an easy task; it requires as much energy as does redoing Lamartine Street or renovating Bromley-Heath. Walk around Jamaica Pond, and you can see a circle of estates, houses and open lands. One such estate that the Jamaica Hills Association wanted to keep untouched is the Cabot Estate. For Mrs. Soltys, the Cabot Estate is "22.8 acres of magnificent vegetation—actually, a gorgeous piece of property. It overlooks Jamaica Pond. It has the old Cabot House and the Storey House. There is another house that is a beautiful example of Victorian architecture."

But one Sunday Mrs. Soltys read in *The Boston Globe* that the new owner of the Cabot Estate planned to put up "three forty-story towers. He proposed to put them on the highest point of the estate, the Whiskey Point area, which would have made them look

tremendous above the pond. It would have been like a massive Prudential Center right on Jamaica Pond."

No one hesitated about what to do. Mrs. Soltys went down to the Jamaica Plain Little City Hall Manager, Bill Edgerton, and said, "Look, we're not going to tolerate it. We'd better start pulling something together." Then, as she explains, "a few of us got together down at the Children's Museum, about ten or twelve people, and tried to convince members of the BRA and the Mayor's Office and Bill that the towers would change the whole character of the neighborhood. And everyone agreed to keep as much open space as possible facing Jamaica Pond and contiguous to Olmsted Park.

"Actually, what we pushed for was to have the city buy the entire parcel as land to add to the park system. We found part of the money, but there was never any way to get all of it. At that point, it became obvious to us that we had to have a top-level task force

to decide what the priorities would be, what the city should demand. Mayor White went along with it. He appointed Bob Weinberg, his next-in-command, and Kenney, who was head of the BRA, Joe Curtis and Leo McCarthy from the parks department, and Eugene Beal, who was head of conservation. Fred Salvucci was on it, and Loren Neveling, who lived here in the neighborhood and was also with the Arnold Arboretum, and myself.

"We worked very hard, and it was a hot July 24th and many people in the neighborhood showed up at the top floor of Curtis Hall that day—they couldn't all get in, there wasn't even standing room—to testify before the task force. And the community told the task force that it wanted to keep as much open space as possible. In the end, the task force recommendation was (a) to buy the property if possible, and if not, (b) to restrict the zoning to open it to town house development. The owner was very decent about it. There wa



*The Police Station
on Seaverns Avenue*



*Jamaica Pond
Ice Company, ca. 1885*

couple of times he lost his temper, he had a big investment, but he agreed, finally, to build clustered two and a half story town houses. And he's giving the front six acres contiguous to Olmsted Park for conservation."

The work of renewing or preserving Jamaica Plain is hard work. As Jack Doherty of the Jamaica Plain Resource Center says, "People shouldn't have to mount big campaigns. Why should an individual have to burn up all his energy to get programs going, when it would take is the tip of the hat from a commissioner in conjunction, maybe, with some agencies?" But on the other hand, Jack Doherty also says that Jamaica Plain is very fortunate. We've got some real dynamite people. They're successful—they have successes and some failures. And they pick themselves right up again. All through Jamaica Plain people—rich and poor, black and white—have learned they have to make their own history, and they do it."

But the world they want Jamaica Plain to be is

something more than streets and parks and houses. Otto Buchwald tells of "the hymns at six o'clock in the evening that come from Boylston Congregational Church." It is, he says, "something that should happen all over Boston. And Sunday morning at ten o'clock and eleven o'clock, it's just wonderful." It reminds him of the churches in Cologne, how "they all sound off at a given hour." Mr. Buchwald also remembers the music played in Jamaica Plain when he was a boy, how on "Sunday afternoons the German band would parade up and down the streets, playing their music. And the kids would pick up fruit from the orchard trees that used to be in the area and throw it at the band, until they broke it up. And the band, then, would chase all the kids over the neighborhood."

In recent days, residents of Cuban background have continued the tradition of parade music. Sister Maria Fernandez tells of the festival called Nuestra Senora del Cobre. The Spanish-speaking people, as she says, "introduced the festival in Jamaica Plain at



Blessed Sacrement, which is part of the Cuban culture. On the eighth of September, they would have a procession. Before Mass they would take the statue of Our Lady along the streets, and they'd have a party. There would be music—choir boys—and instruments, mostly guitars. For Spanish-speaking people the festival is important, because she is the patron of Cuba."

And in the Christmas season, there is caroling from house to house east of Washington Street. Charles Cloherty and his neighbors of different denominations near Peter Parley Road have sung carols together on December evenings for the past four or five years. Mrs. Cloherty says that "it took some doing to get some of these Catholic men to go. They weren't too excited." But Mr. Cloherty explains, "The first night we did it, it was 13 below. Nobody would be excited." Still, his wife notes with a last word, "Those Protestant men sure have good voices, don't they?"

There's music in Jamaica Plain, and there's also the Footlight Club. The secretary of the club, Mrs. Woodall, recounts its history and achievements: "The Footlight was started in 1877, and since that time has

put on almost a thousand performances. It was Miss Carolyn Morse who had the first meeting of the Footlight in her parlor in the late fall of 1876 and sort of formulated the club. They had their first performance on February 9, 1877—it was a drawing room comedy called *A Scrap of Paper*. By 1880, the Footlight Club had its first out-of-town engagement. That was January first, and they went to Manchester. Here it was New Year's Day, they give this performance out-of-town, taking all the scenery with them. In 1884, there was no way to take anything, except to take it in a pung or sledge—it was a very snowy day. They were determined to act. And they went off to Manchester, and put on this program and the seats were 25 cents and reserved seats were 35 cents.

"When the Footlight Club first began, they used the old German Theatre on Boylston Street in Jamaica Plain. Then they moved to Eliot Hall in 1878 and put on all their plays there. The original Eliot Hall has been there since 1831, and then they speak in 187 of Eliot Hall being rebuilt, but we also speak of rebuilding the Hall in 1924. We put on the penthouse

nd put in a new lighting board and refurbished it.

"We have put on one or two plays written by members. The last one was on the ninetieth anniversary of the club. We put on *Portrait of the Prince*, which was written by Florence Freeman, an historical play about Queen Elizabeth. We build our own stages, too. When first joined the Footlight we had a nice core of six or seven people—Barrett Adams and Ed Lyons—who were the stage crew and that's what they wanted to be. They didn't give a hoot about acting. They did a magnificent job.

"And then after the final performance we used to have a cast party. In the thirties and forties, the cast gave the party for the stage crew, because they'd been so good and weren't getting any kudos. They weren't out there bowing to any audiences. And that's what our cast parties used to be. Now everyone who works in the show goes to the party and you bring your own bottle.

"A director of an amateur group has to be aware that he will very seldom get a professional performance. But if he gets from his group everything they can give, he may find them rising above what they knew they had to give. The players love it as true amateurs. The Footlights are the oldest amateur group in continuous operation in this country."

Not far from the Footlight Club on Eliot Street, Jamaica Plain has a new center at Pinebank where youngsters and adults can dance, paint, draw and make clay pots. And there is the Children's Museum on the pond, with its extraordinary displays such as the Haunted House during the Halloween season. Children do more than look at things in the museum. They can touch; they can do things of their own. In 1973, the Children's Museum went into the Jamaica Plain community at the end of October and worked with shop keepers and others to stage a Centre Street fair. The Poltoroks, the owners of Pearl's Candies on Centre Street, participated in the fair. Mr. Poltorok

set up his kettles and candy dipper "right in the window." As he says, "You'd be surprised how many people looked in. They came into the store, and they didn't realize that candy was made that way." The Centre Street Fair, the Footlight Club, the new activities at Pinebank, the boating at Jamaica Pond, the parades and the caroling all make Jamaica Plain a lively place throughout the year. The neighborhood also has wall murals—on the side of Hailer's Pharmacy, along the railroad embankment, at APAC on Call Street, in the playground at Bromley-Heath.

Jamaica Plain feeds the imagination. In the past, men did skillful work at the breweries, the bakeries, and with precision instruments. Walter Hoerner recalls the coopers at Haffenreffer's Brewery: "The coopers were skilled mechanics. I don't think there are many around today. That's a lost art. They could take a barrel, no matter how bad it was, even if there was a stave broken, and could make it new. And then there were the men who used to drain out the big tanks. The men would go into the big tanks, in rubber suits and rubber boots up to their hips, and they'd shovel the sediment of the beer out—malt and yeast—and they'd wash the tanks out and fill them up again. They'd fill the tanks with thousands and thousands of pounds of malt, which looks like oats. They'd put that in there with sugar—tons of sugar. And they'd cook it up, and after it was all done cooking, they'd drain the tank and take the beer out." Emily Serex remembers her grandfather who had come from Switzerland to Jamaica Plain and did engraving and made watchcases.

The springs of the imagination start early in Jamaica Plain. Youngsters on the streets and in the parks turn their neighborhood into a world of Tom Sawyer pranks and Homeric battlegrounds. Jack Doherty, who has lived all his life in Jamaica Plain, remembers that the gangs of boys he knew had names like the Red Devils, the Blue Devils, the Trojans and the War

Hawks. And like warriors in an epic, the boys would enter into battle. One battle, Jack recalls, was at "Murphy playground, seven, eight o'clock at night—the Trojans and the War Hawks. The Trojans had their gang strategically placed around the playground, and down some of the streets. The War Hawks had spotters on them. They saw each other coming, and everybody met. And it was one bloody battle. But the funny thing after that—after a while, the kids became friends and they started to play ball. Not everybody, but some." In Franklin Park, boys once "borrowed" the zebras from the zoo and nearly had the camel stampede them when they set him loose from his cage. Choir boys at Our Lady of Lourdes put up a "for sale" sign on the convent lawn and all but married off the pastor when they put a "just married" sign on the back of his Cadillac, just before he drove through Jamaica Plain one Saturday morning.

The greatest asset of Jamaica Plain is its vitality. Like all city people, the residents of Jamaica Plain talk of their neighborhood as a place that once saw better days. The services are poor, the schools need improvements, the nights are not safe. They express a genuine anxiety—and yet the community, from one end to the other, has an excitement that makes their lives meaningful. Charles McLaughlin, a playground supervisor at Johnson Playground, says of people who have moved elsewhere, "I have seen them. We have a girl who is about eighteen and comes over here daily from West Roxbury. She used to live here, and she'll be back this afternoon. She comes over. Her friends are here, and she has close ties here." And the vitality, as people of Jamaica Plain say, comes from their differences, their many backgrounds, experiences, and purposes. At the same time that the residents may not know one another closely, they share common interests, interests that go right back to the beginnings of the community. Jamaica Plain was once called the Eden of America because of its natural beauty. But it is still an Eden, a garden where darkness and sadness have



View down Centre Street, ca. 1880

come, but where people have shown the generosity, the vitality and the imagination to overcome distress. The people of Jamaica Plain still have much to celebrate.

Project Staff

EUGENE GREEN, *writer*

KATIE KENNEALLY, *project coordinator*

JAN CORASH, *photographic editor*

KATHLEEN KILGORE, *copy editor*

HARRON ELLENSON, *director Boston 200*

MICHAEL AND WINIFRED BIXLER, *typography*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: This work was supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to Eugene Green, Department of English, Boston University. Professor Green accomplished the research and writing of this booklet with the help of many members of the Jamaica Plain Community. The experience and insights of many people contributed to the making of this history. We would like to thank especially the Jamaica Plain Historical Society, the Jamaica Plain Bicentennial Committee, Phil Fixler, Chairman; Stephen Egnatz, Boston Architectural Center, designer of the neighborhood exhibit; the staff of the Connolly and Sedgwick Branches of the Boston Public Library, and the following participants: Elizabeth Amberman, Ginny Belanger, Richard Bonney, Charles Broderick, Otto Buchwald, Edwina S. Cloherty, Anna Cole, Ernest Cohen, Allan Curtis, Jack Doherty, Sr. Maria Fernandez, Jonathan Frank, Katherine Gormley, Lizbeth Healy, Charlotte Hearde, Walter Hoerrner, Richard Howard, Michael Kalajian, Barbara Kieber, John Markuns, Lucille Maxwell, Margaret McDonough, Charles McLaughlin, Margaret Mosher, Ruth Parker, Pearl Potorak, Polly Russell, Florence Soltys, S. Emily Serex, Alice Gray Woodall, Richard Soderberg, and Cynthia Zaitzevsky.

PHOTO CREDITS: Photographs were used courtesy of some of the people listed above and the Arnold Arboretum, the Loring-Greenough House, the Children's Museum, the Print Department of the Boston Public Library, Fowler's Real Estate, the *Jamaica Plain Citizen*, Roger's Drug Store, the Tuesday Club, the Footlight Club, and the Mission Church, Roxbury.

SPONSORS: The Boston 200 Neighborhood Histories Project was made possible through the support of: The Blanchard Foundation, the Godfrey M. Hyams Trust, the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission, Workingmens Co-operative Bank, and the people of the City of Boston.

Boston enjoys an international reputation as the birthplace of our American Revolution. Today, as the nation celebrates its 200th anniversary, that struggle for freedom again draws attention to Boston. The heritage of Paul Revere, Sam Adams, Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill still fire our romantic imaginations.

But a heritage is more than a few great names or places—it is a culture, social history and, above all, it is people. Here in Boston, one of our most cherished traditions is a rich and varied neighborhood life. The history of our neighborhood communities is a fascinating and genuinely American story—a story of proud and ancient peoples and customs, preserved and at the same time transformed by the American urban experience.

So to celebrate our nation's birthday we have undertaken to chronicle Boston's neighborhood histories. Compiled largely from the oral accounts of living Bostonians, these histories capture in vivid detail the breadth and depth of our city's complex past. They remind us of the most important component of Boston's heritage—people, which is, after all, what the Bicentennial is all about.

KEVIN H. WHITE, *Mayor*



Boston 200™









